IN DEFENCE OF THE FAITH

F. B. MEYER

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Christmas 1902

To my faithful brother
Walter F. Wagner
whose intelligent sympathy
and steadfast purpose to serve
has greatly cheered and
helped me.
J. A. Nelson.

In Defence of the Faith

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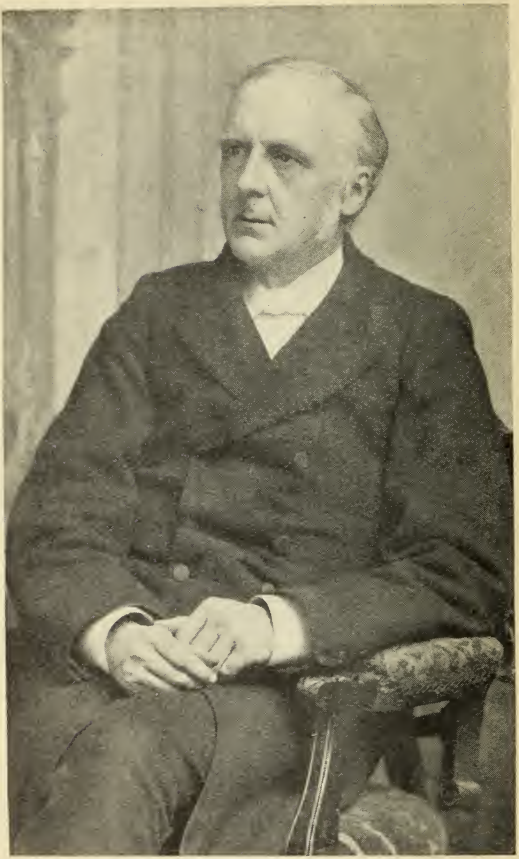


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Yrs sincerely
F. B. Meyer.

In Defence of the Faith

The Old Better than the New

By the

Rev. F. B. Meyer, B.A.

Author of "Steps to the Blessed Life," "Some Secrets of Christian Living," etc., etc.

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Preface

THESE chapters will be of special interest to the church and congregation of Christ Church, to which they were addressed, in another form, on successive Lord's Day evenings at the close of my ministry there, of fifteen years.

But it is thought that they will influence and help a wider circle; and they are sent forth in the hope that they may admonish those that may be breaking from our ranks, encourage the faint-hearted, and support the weak.

May the Good Spirit of God graciously make use of them for the Defence of the Faith!

F. B. MEYER.

THE MEMORIAL HALL,
FARRINGDON STREET, E.C.

Contents

PAGE

THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN OUR LORD'S BIRTH 11

THE DEATH OF THE CROSS 23

SIN MORE THAN SELFISHNESS . . . 39

THE NATURE OF OUR LORD 53

LOSSES AND GAINS IN MODERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT 67

OUR LORD'S CREED 83

The Supernatural Element in our Lord's Birth

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed."



In Defence of the Faith

The Supernatural Element in our Lord's Birth

THERE seems little doubt that the Apostle Paul was fully cognisant of the mystery which attended our Lord's Birth. In a very significant phrase he speaks of Him as "made of a woman" (Gal. iv. 4). We must surely infer that he meant something more than to refer to the ordinary conditions of human birth when he laid stress upon this phrase.

This inference on our part is in keeping with the old Church tradition that as the Apostle Peter wrought with Mark in the preparation of the second Gospel, so Paul

collaborated with Luke in the third Gospel, which is especially the Gospel of our Lord's humanity. We must remember the circumstances under which that Gospel was probably written. In the year 60 A.D. the air was full of enquiries about the Christ. Who is this Jesus? Who were His parents? Where was He born and reared? In what school was He trained? All these enquiries were passing from lip to lip; and as they were answered at third or fourth hand, there was a danger of garbled and erroneous statements becoming current. Under these circumstances, we can imagine the Apostle, who was set for the defence of the Gospel, urging Luke to make a thorough investigation of those great facts which lay at the root of Christianity. "Go," we may imagine his saying, "and investigate from the very earliest sources the story of our Lord's Nativity."

Luke, as we know, was one of the most highly-trained men of the apostolic group. The Greek of the first four verses of his Gospel is the purest Greek in the New Testament, and bears the stamp of high culture. He was, according to the knowledge of that day, a scientific man, and versed in all the questions of birth and life, of motherhood and paternity. No more accurate or suitable investigator could have been commissioned to make the necessary enquiry.

In the prologue of his Gospel he tells us that many had taken in hand to draw up a narrative of those things which had been fulfilled in their midst. He admits that he had not been himself an eye-witness of the original facts, but tells us that "he had traced the cause of all things accurately from the first." The A.V. obscures his meaning by the rendering, "It seemed

good to me also, having had perfect understanding of things from the very first"; but the R.V. very appropriately emphasises the careful investigation which had traced back the wonderful story to the beginning. Those words, "to the very first," clearly point to the endeavour that he had made to discover the earliest traces of our Lord's advent into the world.

Students have remarked on the great difference between the pure Greek of Luke's opening verses and the simplicity of the remainder of the first two chapters of his Gospel. They tell us that these seem to be a translation of the Aramaic patois which was spoken by the peasants of Galilee, and with which the mother of Jesus was certainly familiar. This was the speech in which she had spoken with the Boy Jesus. It was the homespun talk of the carpenter's shop as it was the medium of

His dying utterances. We can imagine how Luke would find the mother of Jesus, now an aged woman, verging perhaps on seventy years, residing, it may be, still in the village of Nazareth. We can see him gently eliciting the things which she had pondered reverently in her heart, and taking them down in what we should call shorthand. We can understand with what careful heed he would catch each word as it fell from her lips, knowing how much depended upon his literal accuracy. There is an artlessness, a simplicity, an exquisite grace in the story, as given in those two memorable chapters, which inevitably directs our minds to that mother-heart which lived still in the ever-memorable events which had transpired across the gulf of years.

With these notes on his writing-tablets, Luke found his way back to the great

Apostle ; and when, finally, the whole story was set out as the portal to the Gospel narrative which followed, it was given to the world with the double endorsement of Luke, the narrator, and of Paul, whose life-course had been so marvellously affected by the facts, which had overborne the opposition of the Pharisees and the arguments of the Sadducees, and of which he said : "Great is the mystery of godliness. He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up to glory."

After all, why should we refuse to accept the statement of the Virgin Birth because of its mystery ? Is there not similar mystery over the birth of every individual ? Even if we are more familiar with the conditions of ordinary birth, are they not surrounded by the veil of inscrutable

mystery? If there were not mystery in the birth of our Lord, might we not seriously question whether He could be the Word who was with God, and who was God? When God becomes manifest in the flesh, surely we must be prepared for His advent in ways that we had not known. If we were to obliterate the mystery of these records, and reduce them to the ordinary light of every day, might not men begin to question whether the Divine Light had really tabernacled in curtains of mortality? Surely there are processes in the eternal world which are hidden from mortal ken, of which God can and must avail Himself when He stoops to deliver man. It is not necessary to believe that He acts against law, but that He introduces some higher law which suspends the operation of a lower one.

At this juncture we may also call in the

testimony of men of science, who will tell us that in the lower orders of creation there are many analogies to the phenomenon of Virgin Birth which is attested both by Matthew and Luke. There are many species of beings in which there is but one parent, and if this is possible in the lower orders of being, why should it not be in the higher also? At least it is absurd for any of us to say that the fact which the Bible records is impossible; that it is unusual or rare, we may say, but that it is impossible no thoughtful man can say.

But, after all, the question is not one of philosophy or speculation or human reason; it is as to the historic worth and accuracy of the Gospels as they come into our hand. They have been subject to searching investigation; they have passed through the crucible of criticism; the keenest intellects have examined them with the microscope

under the fiercest light, and the opinion of highly-trained scholars has repeatedly ascribed to these memoirs the attributes of absolute trustworthiness and authenticity.

In addition to this, the miraculous element of the story has been confirmed by its marvellous effects upon the world. Far and wide it has proved itself the power of God unto salvation. The home-life has been purified, the relation between parents and children ennobled, the sanctions of the marriage life have become enhanced, and myriads of child-hearts have felt the thrill of truth as they have heard the story of Bethlehem. Surely these fruits prove that the tree which has yielded them is one of God's right-hand planting. A polluted fountain could not flow with such pure water, and a bundle of fiction and fables could not yield so fair a harvest.

It may be frankly acknowledged, in the

words of an article on "Present-Day Theology," in the *Homiletic Review*, that, taking this item of the Apostles' Creed as a test, there is not a church in Christendom (not even the most rationalistic form of the Lutheran Church) that would eliminate it from the Creed. Here it may be stated the Christian Church, as a whole, believes that, when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin Mother, He counteracted the natural taint of fallen humanity, so that only a Holy Thing was born of her.

The Death of the Cross

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Death of the Cross

To the Apostle Paul Christ's Death was different from all other deaths, and not to be mentioned in the same category with them. A whole heaven of difference intervened between the Death of Jesus Christ and that, for instance, of Socrates, the Athenian Sage.

So far as we know, Socrates lived a pure and beautiful life. He was sincere, upright, disinterested, and singularly pious, according to the light he received. His disciple and intimate friend, Xenophon, declares that he never undertook any work without first asking counsel of the gods. A sense of God, a strong faith in the influence and presence of God, and a deep desire to be

governed by Him, were habitual to his soul. He devoted his life to the diffusion of what he believed to be the highest truth ; sought for scholars not only among men of rank, but among labourers and mechanics ; and gathered around him a body of devoted followers. Finally, he was condemned to drink the cup of hemlock. Why is it that the death of Socrates is viewed as the death of a martyr, as an incident, an episode, as a tragic termination to a useful life, whilst in the judgment of Paul and others, who knew the circumstances well, the Death of Jesus Christ is set forth as the main end and object of His Incarnation? The life and words of Socrates are his main contribution to the world ; but, if compelled to choose, who would not be willing to part with the records of our Lord's life and teaching, so long as the record of His Death remained to us? Indeed, though the Apostle Paul

must have been familiar with all the things that Jesus did and taught, he makes comparatively small reference to them, determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He summed up the conclusion to which he had come, after a long survey of the possible objects which were worth living for, by saying: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It may be said that the peculiar emphasis laid by the Apostle on the Death of Christ is the main reason of the special significance with which Christendom has invested it, but it must be remembered that Paul reads into the tragedy of Calvary nothing more than was already implied by the words which our Lord Himself used concerning it. Just as the plant is contained in the original seed, so the whole doctrinal position

of the Pauline Epistles on the Lord's death is implied in two statements made by our Lord Himself. It is to these that our attention must be directed if we would understand the Cross aright.

(1) Six months before our Saviour died, as He turned His back upon the open door of Paradise, and took the cypress-lined path which led to the Cross, it is evident that He knew precisely all things which awaited Him, for He enumerated them, item by item, to His Apostles; and added, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, *and to give His life a Ransom for many*" (Mark x. 45). Notice that remarkable word. It implies the ransom price of a slave. Socrates could not speak thus of his death; no one could impute to that cup of hemlock the power of redeeming others from the consequences

of their sin ; but, as spoken by the lips of Jesus, the word has a priceless value, suggesting that He was prepared to redeem us, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with His own precious blood. We must view the Cross through the lens of His own consciousness.

(2) Once again, in the upper room, darkened by the sable wings of approaching death, when His followers gathered around Him with awe-struck faces and hushed voices, our Lord took the cup and said: "This cup is the new testament in My Blood, shed for you and for many *for the remission of sins*" (Matt. xxvi. 28). These words again unfold the depths of our Saviour's inner consciousness, as He drew near the hour of His decease. He was conscious that He was about to bear the sin of the world, and that by His stripes

men were to be healed. Did Socrates ever dream of suggesting that his death could remit sin? and does not this reference on the part of our Lord give new meaning to the words of 1 Cor. xv. 3: "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that *Christ died for our sins*, according to the Scriptures"?

These two passages are of the greatest importance in indicating the view which our Lord had of His death, and again we ask whether there is anything advanced in the Epistles of Paul which has not already been implied in the words of the Master Himself?

It may be said that the agony in the garden was inconsistent with the exalted purpose of the Saviour of the world. Did He not seem to shrink, as any man might shrink, from the anticipated anguish of Crucifixion? As He lay on the crushed

grass of the garden, which He bedewed with the sweat of blood, did it not seem as though His weak human nature were strained even to breaking-point, revealing only manhood in the throes of mortal agony? But remember that a nobler explanation can be given, which effectually disposes of the suggestion that Gethsemane is inconsistent with the conception of the Cross as the supreme sacrifice for sin. Two contending passions met in the bosom of Christ. On the one hand was the passion of the Redeemer to finish the work that He had undertaken, to return to the Father's bosom, to accomplish redemption. Did He not say that He was straitened until His Baptism was accomplished? But, on the other hand, there was the passion of the patriot. Our Lord knew well that His murder would bring the indelible stain of disgrace upon the people to whom He

belonged. There was, above all, the horror of being made sin for us all, and bearing away the guilt of the world. And as these two, the desire to depart and the dread of being forsaken by God for our sake, met in His heart, they ruptured its slender walls, and pressed the blood upon His brow.

We therefore must believe that when our Lord died He took upon Himself the sin of the race, its shame, its curse, and the penalty of its infraction of the moral law of the universe. We may not be able to say exactly how our Lord's sufferings were an equivalent for the punishment due to the race for sin, but we must believe the statements of the whole New Testament, where inspired men one after another assert that "He bore our sins in His own Body on the tree," "that He suffered the Just for the unjust," and that "He was made a curse

for us." Nothing can be clearer than that statement in Colossians i. 20, that "through Him God made peace by the Blood of His Cross, that He might reconcile all things unto Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven."

The work of our Lord, however, has been frequently greatly misrepresented. Untaught persons have put it thus—that if there were in the same school two boys, one notoriously bad, and the other quite exemplary for his goodness, and if the bad boy deserved punishment but the teacher chose to call up the good one and make him suffer, the bad boy might be let off. But it must not be supposed for a moment that the Infinite God imposed suffering upon the holy soul of Jesus by His arbitrary, though Divine will. Had this been the case, it would have been an act of injustice,

before which the very foundations of the Eternal Throne would have rocked. God must be just, when He becomes the Justifier. Let me give an illustration which seems to me to offer a truer standpoint from which we may enter into the meaning of "that wondrous Death."

Years ago, when I was working in Leicester amongst discharged prisoners, I was in the habit of taking them to an institution which I founded. One rule of the establishment was that no one should touch intoxicating liquor as long as he remained there. To be drunk was to involve instant expulsion. One morning, when I reached the place, my manager told me that four men had become drunk on the preceding night, and as I entered the breakfast-room to conduct prayers, the four men were seated together on a form, whilst around them were grouped some thirty

others, all interested in the proceedings. For a moment I was in a dilemma. If I dismissed the men, as my rules demanded, I should lose the results of all my trouble with them, besides almost certainly landing them in prison again; but if, on the other hand, I were to forgive them and pass over their fault, the remainder of the men would say that what I had done for them I would do for others, and I might have had every one of them drunk by nightfall. I therefore bethought me of the following expedient. I said: "Men, I am a poor man, and am keeping up this place at a great expenditure of vital energy. I have often to sit up late at night writing in order to earn money to maintain it. Every sovereign therefore which I earn stands for hard work, and toil, and forfeiture of sleep, but I am prepared to put down a piece of gold as a ransom for each of you four men, that, by suffering

myself, I may be able to save you from suffering, or being sent back to your old ways." The men were deeply affected, and the shuttles of repentance began to weave the fabric of a new life within them, for all the men in the place felt that my forgiveness had cost me blood, that the moral government of the institution had been maintained, and that sin on their part was not to be thought of, in view of the inevitable cost to myself.

This, in poor human act, seems to set forth the heart of the Atonement, in which God in the person of Christ took upon Himself the shame and sorrow of the race, and bore it for us all. Of course it is always possible for any of us to contract ourselves out of the benefits of the Atonement, but we do so to our own infinite loss, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them," and hath committed unto His servants the ministry of reconciliation, so that men are bidden to lay down their opposition, ground their arms, and accept the Atonement.

But there is more. We are told that it was by "the Eternal Spirit" that our Lord offered Himself without spot to God. There is therefore the element of Eternity in the Cross. It does not belong to one age, nor to the past. It is not separated from us by the chasm of nineteen centuries. It towers over the wrecks of time. It has, therefore, perennial potency and power, as we may prove for ourselves. In the first chapter of his first Epistle to Corinth, the Apostle says that "the word of the Cross is to them who are being saved the Power of God."

We can, as we have said, prove this for ourselves. If the virus of sin is poisoning the fountain of our blood, if we are being

continually overmastered by corrupt and evil passion, let us by the Holy Spirit seek personal and conscious union with Christ in His Cross: so shall we be delivered from the bondage of corruption and share the eternal victory of His Resurrection; and this will prove that His Death was no ordinary martyrdom.

Sin More than Selfishness

"Sin is the Transgression of the Law."

Sin More than Selfishness

THE endeavour is being made to interpret the Religion of Christ in terms of a philosophical system, and the amount of cutting-off and paring-down which has to be done to get Christ into the small containing space is prodigious. Indeed, there is not much left, certainly nothing worth dying for, hardly enough worth living for.

Amongst other shrinkages, we find that the conception of sin, which is now being promulgated, and which we are being coaxed to accept, is that it is selfishness. "The sinful life is the life which is lived for self alone" (*The New Theology*, p. 52). We are prepared to admit that sin is the assertion of our self-life, of the "I" which is

always striving for prominence; but surely that is not all to be said of it. This definition may be true when sin is viewed simply from the standpoint of nature and philosophy; but there are other aspects from which we must view it. There are other planes of being and thinking into which sin has intruded and which it has disturbed; and from these we must obtain those further conceptions of the nature of sin, which must be considered before our analysis can be complete and our definition satisfactory.

This is no heresy-hunt, no theological hair-splitting. Everything in religion hinges on the conception which is held of sin. If sin is only an outburst of selfishness, it may be cleansed with rose-water. The text that reminds us that our Redeemer came "not by water only, but by water and blood," will be robbed of its significant emphasis;

and we shall be told that "the blood of Calvary is the symbol of the freely-offered love of Christ," that "the spirit of self-sacrifice and love was and is the real blood of Christ."

What is to save Religion from dying out? Certainly not Philosophy nor Institutionalism, not the Cinematograph nor the Social element in the Church-life; but the conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, expressed in the terms of the present day, and driven home on the conscience and heart, with the fire and cogency of John Owen, though probably not with his precise terminology. Does not our nation and our age need awakening to the claims *of God?* Is it not necessary to show how sin affects *Him*, and that it is not merely selfishness, but a *crime* against Him, as the Moral Ruler of the Worlds, and *rebellion* against the Father of our spirits?

Take this definition of sin, that it is only selfishness, into *the Court of Conscience.* Will it stand the white light which streams from that miniature judgment-seat? No, for when we have sinned, the inward voice of conscience immediately insists that we have wrought an injury against God, against His moral rule, as well as against ourselves and our neighbours. Even if we ask the pardon of some fellow-sinner whose rights we have invaded, we can never really rest until we have sought and obtained the forgiveness of the Almighty.

Take this definition into *the Court of History.* Is it all that should be said,—said of Nero or Borgia, when the historian describes them as prostituting every interest committed to their keeping,—that it was the indulgence of selfish and sensual passion? Surely, they were more than selfish! They must be brought in as guilty of high crimes

against humanity, whose guise they wore, against the claims of the Moral Universe which they flouted, and against the God who made them! As their Maker, He had a right to claim their gratitude for His mercies, and their recognition of His righteous rule!

Take the definition into the Court of Autobiography. Ask *David*, weeping over the fatal sin that brought so dark a stain on his fair robe, and so lasting a slur on his good name, whether he is not too profuse in his self-condemnation, since his sin was simply an excess of self-gratification, and he will turn away as from a miserable comforter, crying: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou may be justified when Thou speakest and be clear when Thou judgest." Open *The Confessions of Augustine*, and notice how, in every para-

graph, he turns from the sin which he recounts, to pour out his entreaties and cries for mercy into the ear of Him who fills heaven and earth. Turn to Shakespeare, than whom none has proved himself a greater master of the passages of the soul. Is there not something more than the confession of selfishness in those words of Macbeth, when he asks Whether "all great Neptune's ocean" can wash the blood of the murdered king clean from his hand?

What would *Paul*, that great self-anatomist, have said, when he was lamenting in his later life over the persecution of the martyrs of the early Church, if he had been told that, after all, he could only accuse himself of unbounded selfishness? "Nay," he would reply, "say not so, for I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, and I needed to obtain mercy

from the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ which abounded toward me."

We are told that "sin has never injured God except through man" (*The New Theology*, p. 53), and that there is no Great White Throne. But surely God must have some claims on His creatures, to say nothing about His children; and where those claims are resisted or ignored, there is an immediate rupture of the happy fellowship, and a sense of the grave wrong which has been perpetrated. God has also issued explicit commands and injunctions, which are written alike in the Nature of Things, in the constitution of Human Nature, and in Scripture. When men violate and condemn these, surely they incur penalty, as they certainly inflict an injury on the kingdom of His Grace. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master,

where is my fear?" "All have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God."

We have been told of late that we are not altogether responsible for our sin, or at least we are to regard it as inevitable in the processes of the Divine self-realisation. The man who got drunk last night, the *roué* in Piccadilly, were in search of God. Sin is a quest for the Infinite. But this seems like doing evil that good may come. We have no right to assume that we must pass through the commission of wrong things in order to know right, and must be very jealous of any teaching which lessens the responsibility of the soul. The words of the Book of Job must always claim our heed, not only because of their venerable age, but because they have been verified by centuries of Christian experience. "I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." Supposing that a

criminal, brought before a judge for drunken and disorderly conduct, were to plead that he was not responsible, because of his heredity, or environment, or the natural laws of moral evolution, he would not escape the penalty of fine or imprisonment, and what will not avail in the lower plane of earthly justice will be found wanting in the High Plane of the Eternal Justice.

It has often been affirmed that "every fall is a fall upward." If that were so, the sin of an Iscariot was a prodigious advance towards his ultimate salvation. At this rate, the more men sin the quicker will be their complete deliverance. At Meudon, in the French Revolution, says Joseph Cook, gloves were made out of human skins; but would anyone care to comfort the relatives of the flayed Frenchmen, that sin was a necessary step in the process of virtue—development? On that hypothesis, by many

a long, winding slope, every thief, and leper, and perjurer, and murderer, would come at last to a height as lofty as he could have reached if he had gone up without sin. Iago falls; but he falls upward. He is getting possession of his faculties. This kind of learning does not tend to comfort you if some miscreant has stolen your watch!

Sin is the refusal or failure to realise God's ideal, the outlines of which are written on the soft tablets of the heart, and embodied in the perfect man, Christ Jesus. When a clock is in order, it keeps time; and when our moral nature is in order, it will obey the promptings of conscience and the dictates of Scripture. But too often, when the inner voice says, "You ought," we reply, "But we will not"; or when it says, "You ought not," we reply, "We will." The wheels may be of gold,

silver, or precious stones, but if the clock fails to keep the hour, of what use is it? and if we fail of God's purpose, we are rejected and come nigh to the curse.

Sin is negative as well as positive. It is a failure to realise God's standard, equally as it is a distinct invasion of His rights. It may be forgiven, when we forsake it, turn from it, and confess it. But the secondary results will yet accrue. The evil entail will refuse to be cut off. The limp caused by the serpent's sting may be almost obliterated, but the scar must remain. God can forgive, and He can forgive fully, because He bore our sins in His own body on the Tree; but we reap as we have sown. Sin is therefore more than selfishness. It is a crime against the Holy God, and its forgiveness is only possible because God, in the Person of Christ, bore our sins in His own body on the Tree.

The following sane, strong words by Professor Orr are of immense weight in this connection. He says: "The 'Fall' is put in question by evolution; but unless sin is made a necessity, and deprived of its heinousness before God, which made redemption needful, its origin must ever be sought in the voluntary departure from rectitude of a creature who had the power to live obediently."

The Nature of Our Lord

"Thomas answered, and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

The Nature of Our Lord

IF we take Scripture for our Guide and Authority, we cannot doubt *the Pre-existent Glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle tells us that He was "in the form of God" (Phil. ii. 5–8), and the Greek word translated "form," means a great deal more than the external appearance. It stands for the essence of God's nature, so that there is an exact agreement between the Epistle to the Philippians and the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, where we are taught that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the same was in the beginning with God" (John i. 1–4).

These deep words prove that whatever

God was in the uncreated eternity of the past—the infinite, the incomprehensible, the all-holy, the all-blessed, *that* the Eternal Christ was, who was as absolutely one with Him, as spirit and soul are one in the organisation of our nature.

When, therefore, we are told on the first page of the Bible that God made man in His own image and after His likeness, we are intended to believe that the Christ, who from all Eternity was "in the bosom of the Father," gave the type after which our human nature was modelled. It is just what we might have expected, then, that those who "put on" Christ discover that they are being renewed unto knowledge, after (or according to) the image of Him who originally created them (Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 10).

Christ is called the "Word of God," because through Him the Abysmal God has

uttered Himself. As a man utters himself, and makes his thoughts and feelings known by the words he speaks, so God has made Himself known to us in the Son of His love, who in another place is said to be "*the image of the invisible God.*" Yet again, He is described as "*the effulgence of His glory*," *i.e.*, the outshining ray of the Eternal Sun, and "the *very image of His substance*," *i.e.*, corresponding to the Divine nature, as a seal to the die (Heb. i. 3).

Through Christ the Material Universe came into existence. "*All things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing made that was made*" (John i. 2 ; see also Col. i. 15–17). Notice the clear distinction made here. The Pantheist says that God is All, and that All is God. His faith is summed up in the aphorism of Hegel—"All that is, is Divine." There is no room for Prayer, for sin, for the Atonement, in

that dreary system. How can you pray, there is None to address except the God, who is in each one of us? How can you sin, when all you do is due to the effort of the God, who is within you, towards self-realisation? How can there be Atonement, when there is no Being higher and better than you are to step in and bear the brunt of your wrong-doing?

Notice how carefully accurate the inspired writings are! There was a time when the material universe did not exist—*it was created.* But the world is not God. Created things are not God. They are sustained by One who brought them into being, and pervades them in all their fulness, but is apart from them, God over all, blessed for ever. Between these created things, which we see, touch, and handle, and the great God whom no man can see and live, there is the Word, who has ever acted

as the medium for God's utterance, and for the forth-putting of His power. Himself God, He uttered God. No other being could have done so, because He stood in a unique relation to God, just as our speech cannot be used by any other than ourselves. Inspiration therefore writes the name of Christ on stars and clouds, on avalanches and snowflakes, on the pillared forest, and the blades of the meadow. Everywhere we meet the touch of "His unrivalled finger."

Throughout the ages the progress of mankind has been due to His direction. From Christ those quickening impulses have been received, which have kept mankind from being overwhelmed in the Stygian bog of self-indulgent passion. From Him the great teachers of our race have derived their inspiration. As "the true light," He has lighted every man coming into the

world (John i. 9). The regular advance of human history, in spite of many endeavours to resist it, has been due to the promptings and ideals which He has communicated. His delights have ever been with the sons of men, and the growth of civilisation in science, medicine, art, and mechanical power must be traced to Him, as its Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, first and last. He spoke in the eloquence of Isaiah and the tears of Jeremiah, in the argument of the Book of Job and the Psalm-lyrics of David, in Moses and Malachi. The portions were divers, and the manners many, but the Voice was One. The Rise of Egypt, the Fall of Babylon, the conquests of Cyrus and Alexander, the imperial splendour of Rome, the invasion of the Northern Peoples, were all steps in that Plan, which He is leading by successive stages to one final and glorious goal.

As Jesus Christ God became Incarnate. God was manifest in Jesus Christ in a manner that cannot be approached by any human being beside. Think for a moment of that remarkable scene, six months before the death on the Cross, and on the eve of the Transfiguration, when Peter acknowledged Him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16). From the manner with which our Lord greeted this appellation, it is clear that Peter meant, and that Jesus knew that he meant, more than could be said of any ordinary man. The *Socinian* holds that Jesus Christ was man, only of such remarkable moral eminence that He may be said to be Divine. The *Arian* maintains that He existed before His Incarnation, but that there was a time when He did not exist. The *Pantheist* believes Him to be an exhibition of the Divine Immanence on

the highest plane, and counts that the same energy will ultimately realise the same result in all men. But against these we oppose the ancient creed: "I believe in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God. Begotten of His Father before all Worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten not made, Being OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man."

We must guard against a conception of Christ which says that He is the perfect Revelation of God, but that He is not personally God. We must also beware of the idea that we were as really and truly present as He was in the Divine Nature from all eternity. We must equally take

care that we do not rob our Lord of a truly human body and soul. Nothing can be more absolute than the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, that the Eternal Word *became flesh.* "He took," says Liddon, "a Body of Flesh, and His whole Humanity both of Soul and Body shared in the sinless infirmities which belong to our common nature. . . . The place of a created individual at the root of thought and feeling and will is supplied by the Eternal Word, who has wrapped around His Being a created Nature, through which, in its unmutilated perfection, He acts upon mankind.

When we speak of our Lord as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, we must not suppose that we are called to acknowledge three Gods. The word "Person" means primarily the mask worn by an actor, and the *persons* of the God-

head are used to denote three distinct forms of Being, which are eternal and necessary in the One supreme Essence, which we know as God.

But in the Incarnation our Lord submitted to certain limitations, which the Apostle refers to when he says, "He emptied Himself" (Phil. ii. 7, R.V.). His miracles, for instance, were not wrought by the putting forth of His intrinsic and original power as God, but by the power which He received hour by hour from the Father. He did nothing from Himself, didn't speak His own words, or do His own works. The Father that indwelt Him was the source of all. "God was in Christ." Whatever Christ did, God did through Him; so that the death of the Cross was the act of the entire Deity, "through the Eternal Spirit." Let us love Him the more, because absolutely and voluntarily He forewent the

use of attributes that lay all around Him, like tools within the reach of the skilled mechanic, that He might live a truly human life, weeping our tears and receiving from the Father "grace upon grace."

In His Resurrection and Ascension, however, our Lord resumed the use of those Attributes, which He had temporarily laid aside. Just so, a man might resume the use of his right hand, which he had temporarily held behind his back. In His exaltation to the right hand of power, our Lord now therefore combines the glory of the perfected Manhood and the glory of the Blessed God, which He had with the Father before the world was made. His Name (that is, His Nature) is therefore above every name. To the name of Jesus, the perfected servant, is added the incommunicable name of Jehovah. In that name every knee shall bow, and every

tongue confess that He is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father: and He is with us in the weary march of the generations, in harmony with His faithful word, "Lo, I am with you always, unto the consummation of the Age."

How long that moment may be distant we know not. This only we are certain of, that He will ultimately put down all rule, and authority, and power. "And when all things have been subjected unto the Father, then shall the Son (in the mediatorial capacity) also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all."

Losses and Gains in Modern Religious Thought

"Beware lest any spoil you through Philosophy and vain Deceit."

Losses and Gains in Modern Religious Thought

THE Religious world has been strangely moved of late with what professes to be a fresh statement of the Christian Faith. With respect to this we enter the following cautions:—

(1) *You may gain a Philosophy and lose your Religion.* The Philosophic system which is being so widely discussed at the present time is known as Monistic Idealism. Monistic is of course derived from the Greek word *Only* or *Alone.* Monistic Idealism is the conception of the Universe as being the expression of one indwelling Omnipresent Power which enters into the tiniest atom

of the whole. In order to understand this system, let us conceive of a tree which from its root, trunk, bark, branches, twigs, leaves, bloom, fruit is all permeated and penetrated by one life. The whole of this great universe, embracing all that is material, intellectual, moral, may therefore be conceived as the expression of the one indwelling and immanent spirit which pervades, inspires, and infills all things. This, speaking generally, is Monistic Idealism. It is an ancient system of thought which dates from days far away, beyond the time of Christ; and those who hold it come very near Pantheism, which teaches that "Pan," *i.e. The All*, is *God*; "Theism"—All is God and God is All. On the one hand it is said—"All that is, is divine," and the contrary of that is true—that God is the reality of which the whole universe is the expression. Consequently, according to this teaching, we

must believe that God is not a Person as distinct from other persons. To use the words of the editor of the *British Weekly*—"His goodness is the goodness of His creatures. His knowledge is the sum of their knowledge, that, and no more. God has no existence out of the world any more than life has outside of things living." In other words, God does not live apart from the universe, but He is embodied in the universe, and it is the expression of His nature.

The logical outcome of this is that God becomes indwelling and immanent, but not transcendent, for it is certain that there cannot be two Infinities. Supposing this is so, and we go along this path, it finally brings us to the brink of an abyss. God ceases to be personal, He is no longer the Father, the Creator, the Infinite Lover of man; He becomes the sum of all Being. Surely it is a perfect Sahara to lose the

Personal God "by Whom all things were made," and who from outside the universe redeems, guides, and saves. It is an awful thing to lose the sense of a Personal Deity. As Tennyson says, you become "an infant crying in the night, and with no language but a cry," and you cry in vain! By crushing Christianity into this philosophic system, you really deprive it of everything that makes it worth holding, and in your endeavour to be philosophical you cease to be religious in the sense of being bound to God as a child to its parent. Let us not forget that our Lord lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, "Father"; and that the Apostle Paul bowed his knee to the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom the whole universe in heaven and earth is named."

(2) *You gain a new significance for a number of old terms, but you lose the doctrines*

which underlie those terms and give them their living power. The New Theologian sings our hymns, but cannot mean what we do when he sings them; he uses our litanies and prayers, but they do not mean to him what they do to us; he uses the old Bible texts, but that meaning which apostles, prophets, and martyrs put into them, he studiously avoids. It is as though he bakes bread in the same sized loaves as we have been accustomed to from childhood, and labels them by the same names, but the life-giving elements which nourish health and strength are absolutely wanting.

We will take, for instance, an extract from a recent sermon. The text was that last great message and promise of Christ—"I am with you alway, even to the end of the age." The preacher said that the thought he wanted them to take away with them was the declaration "that the spirit

of Jesus and the spirit of this mysterious universe of ours were one and the same; seeing Him they saw all; they could not escape the universe; it was with them all the days." According to this interpretation, the words "I am with you always," which the whole Church has taken to indicate the perpetual presence of Christ as guiding and leading the march of the Church, is watered down to mean only this, that the universe is with us always. But surely we need something more than the universe to help us in times of temptation and sorrow; we want a hand, a heart, a Person.

Or take another word, the word Atonement. We are taught that we must look for the key to its significance in the Semitic conception rather than the Hebrew, in the slaying of an animal and eating of its flesh that the worshipper may be brought into fellowship with his fellow, and into fellow-

ship with God. In this there was no thought of a substitution, no thought that sin was to be put away, it was just a feast of fellowship or self-sacrifice; but if that is all, the Atonement is robbed of the peace-giving conception that God in the Person of Christ bore the equivalent of the curse and shame by His death on the Cross. This teaching deprives the death of Christ of the elements in it which gave peace to men like Augustine, Bunyan, Wesley, and millions more, and the Atonement is reduced to the level of Keir Hardie standing in the House of Commons and pleading for his class, of a Salvation Army lass helping to rescue a woman from her drunken husband, or of a band of fishermen plunging into the stormy waters to save their comrades. That is all good and beautiful, but it will not suffice for consciences which are deeply convicted of sin; they need something which that

conception of the Atonement fails to impart, but which the old Hebrew thinkers, guided by the Spirit of God, saw in it, who believed that on the Cross, God Himself, in the Person of Christ, took home to Himself the equivalent of human sin, and bore it "in His own Body on the tree."

(3) *You gain a new conception of human nature, but in doing so you lose the Unique Nature of Christ.* Jesus Christ is said to represent the human element which has been in the Divine nature from all eternity. In that sense, of course, He was pre-existent, but only in the same sense in which we must all be conceived of as having been equally pre-existent. He, and we, and all men partake of the same nature, and are equally divine; but, by this hypothesis, He is not more divine than we are. He was born as we are, only He was capable

of receiving to a fuller extent God into His nature than the rest of mankind. A recent writer was surely perfectly justified in asking how, then, it could be accounted for that there has been only one Christ? Why, through all these centuries when the character of Christ has been so prominently before the world, have not others received God to the same extent into their nature? and who shall say that in ten or a hundred years from now there shall not arise another being who shall receive God into his nature more absolutely than Christ did? It cannot be said that this is impossible. On the hypothesis that Christ received God into His being as we do, there is no essential difference between Christ and other men; and there is therefore nothing to prevent someone else with a wider, greater, fuller capacity, taking in still more of God.

On this showing, Christ ceases to be our transcendent King because of the unique glory of His nature. If He is above us, it arises not from a difference in nature, but in capacity. He was born of human parents by the natural act of generation, and there must have been in Him, therefore, the taint which attaches to all mankind. To renounce the Virgin Birth is to renounce the immaculate purity that knew no sin.

(4) *You get a new conception of Sin which fails to satisfy Conscience.* Sin is defined as Selfishness. Every fall is a fall up. Judas, traitor though he were, will at last find his way to the top. Sin becomes the impulse of passion rather than the choice of the will. The *roué* in the midst of his immoralities, and the drunkard swept before the strong tide of inebriety, are in

the process of evolution. According to this philosophy, young men are justified in saying, when you remonstrate with them, "We shall come right at last. It will be a long way round, but we like the primrose easy path." In *East and West* for January, Canon Brown said he had to do with a Hindoo in Calcutta who came to him to be delivered from the power of Drink. The Canon did his best, but one day the man fell worse than ever. The Canon asked, "How has this happened?" and the man replied, "I have been to a Pundit, one of our holiest teachers, and he tells me that whatever a man does, God does in him. It is not I that did it, but the Divine nature. I shall come right at last."

But this robs Conscience of her voice. We know that Sin is more than Selfishness, and that even though we have confessed our outburst of temper or unkindness to

our fellow-creature, we have still the sense in the depth of our heart that our Sin cries to God, and that we never can be at rest until He has spoken the Divine word of Pardon.

(5) *You lose your individual existence in the great Hereafter.* We may be told that the spark of our Consciousness will be fulfilled in eternal being; and that, as the bubble which forms on the ocean surface sinks back into it, we shall exist as a film in the great ocean of existence. If so, all the experience, all the patience, all the discipline of this mortal life will fall into the universal stock, and our personalities will be eliminated.

Do not let us forsake the Old Book. There is nothing better. Let us bind it again to our heart. It made martyrs, confessors, and saints, but we may gravely

question whether the teaching which is now in vogue is capable of forming characters that will stand the test of persecution and death in the same way that the New Testament teaching has been tested by stake and sword. "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables," says the Apostle, "when we made known unto you the power and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His Majesty."

Dr Foster, of the Lebanon Theological Seminary, has put the whole issue in a nutshell, when he says: "If there is anything new in substance, as well as in form, it is not to be relied on by the Church, either for its own needs, or the needs of the world. The Gospel which is to keep the Church alive in the twentieth century is the same Gospel that has kept the world from putrefaction during all the ages past. It is the same Church, the same world, the same

disease, the same crime, the same curse, the same remedy, endlessly. The Church received what have been called its marching orders from its Lord, but it received no command to go forth and discover the truth. Its business is to make good use of what long ago was committed to it."

Our Lord's Creed

"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God."

Our Lord's Creed

It is neither accurate nor fair to say that we owe our theology to the Apostle Paul. He may have had a large share in shaping it, but there is nothing in his Epistles of which we may not easily discover the primordial germ in the teaching of our Lord.

Let us take one Gospel—that according to the Evangelist Matthew—the historicity of which will be granted by our critics, and let us carefully search out for ourselves, in these venerable paragraphs, the substance of the Creed which lay at the foundation of our Saviour's words, and which, speaking of Him from the human standpoint, we may say was His own.

The statement of Belief which is generally accepted by all Christians is that known as the Apostles' Creed. Its origin is by no means clear. Probably it emanated from the Sub-Apostolic Age; but in any case it comprehends in a succinct and definite form the faith, "which was once for all delivered to the saints." It is a noteworthy fact that there is only one clause in the Apostles' Creed which, for obvious reasons, cannot be substantiated from the lips of Christ; and it may be a solid ground for the faith of some to remember for all future time that *the Apostles' Creed was also Christ's Creed.*

Before we substantiate that statement, let us remember *our Lord's veneration for the Old Testament Scriptures.* If there is nothing in Paul, which was not first in Christ; so there is nothing in the New Testament, which was not first in the Old;

and it was our Lord's delight to correct the false exegesis and conclusions of His age, and to prove to His contemporaries that they erred, because they knew not the Scriptures, nor the Power of God. As a lad His memory and heart were filled with the Holy Scriptures; on the Mount of Temptation, He parried the assaults of the Tempter by their words; and throughout His life He was always asking His critics, "Have ye never read?" It was on Scripture that He pillowed His heart in its last agony; and when He rose, both on His way to Emmaus, in the Upper Room, and for the following Forty-days, He was perpetually unfolding to His disciples all the things which were written in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning Himself (Luke xxiv. 27, 44). In all, He quoted from 24 out of the 39 Old Testament Books, made 66 references to the Pentateuch, 40

to Isaiah, 36 to the Psalms, and 22 to Daniel. It is not a little remarkable to find that the whole of our Lord's Theology (speaking from the human standpoint) was extracted from the Old Testament Scriptures; and when, therefore, we speak of His Creed, we are also dealing with that venerable Body of Truth which has descended to us from ages when the world was younger by several millenniums than it is to-day. But truth is never old.

We say, *I believe in God the Father Almighty.* Our Lord always insisted that God was His Father in a unique and special sense. It was for this that the Jews, on two occasions at least, took up stones to cast at Him for blasphemy (John v. 18; x. 33). His whole conflict with the Pharisaic party turned upon this point. But there was no hesitancy in His royal affirmation of this position. "I thank Thee,

O Father," He said, "Lord of Heaven and Earth" (Matt. xi. 25); and when He was on the threshold of death, it was to His Father that He directed His cry: "O My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, Thy will be done" (xxvi. 42).

We say, *Maker of Heaven and Earth.* The Jew viewed God as his special Patron Deity. Abraham was His friend; the land of Palestine His peculiar choice; and Jerusalem the Holy City; whilst the nations of the world were viewed as lying outside His care. But from the first He resented Satan's claim that the kingdoms of the world or their glory belonged to him. In the Parable of the Tares, He asserted God's claim to the whole round world as His Field; He insisted that all nations would be gathered before His Judgment Seat; and as He ascended, He declared that all authority was now His in Heaven

and on Earth (iv. 9; xiii. 38; xxv. 32; xxviii. 18).

We say, *And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.* Six months before He died, before He climbed the Transfiguration Mount, our Lord challenged His Disciples to know what men were thinking of Him; and presently Peter stepped out of the little circle to attest that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Did Peter mean by that statement that Jesus Christ was a man like himself, only with a little more capacity for God? If so, our Lord could not have greeted his words with the solemn affirmation: "Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in Heaven." And afterwards at the crisis of His Trial, when He was challenged by Caiaphas to say who He was, and whether He were the Christ, the Son of God, "Jesus saith unto him,

Thou hast said; nevertheless, I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power." At once they rent their clothes and pronounced Him to be guilty of the death allotted to the blasphemer (xvi. 16; xxvi. 63, etc.).

We say, *He was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.* For obvious reasons that cannot be substantiated from our Lord's words, though Matthew does not hesitate in the most circumstantial manner to affirm it (i. 18, etc.).

We say, *He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was Crucified, Dead, and Buried.* But this was clearly foreseen by the Master, when He began to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up (xvi. 21; xx. 18). We

have already seen that our Lord knew well the sacrificial and substitutionary character of His death. It was the ransom price of our Redemption; it was for the remission of sin (xx. 28; xxvi. 28).

We say, *He descended into Hell*, i.e. *Hades*. In one of our Lord's discussions with the Scribes, you will remember that He said: "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (xii. 40); using, in this latter phrase, a well-known expression among the Jews of His time, for the place of the departed spirits (xii. 40).

We say also, *On the third day He rose again from the dead.* Our Lord knew perfectly well that He was to rise again. He said: "All ye shall be offended in Me this night . . . but after I am raised up, I will go before you unto Galilee" (Matt.

xxvi. 32; xxviii. 16). As He went down into the grave, He stayed Himself on the words of Psalm xvi.: "Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou give Thy Holy One to see corruption."

We say, *He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God*; and we are reminded of our Lord's words: "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power" (xxvi. 64). And if we continue the noble words, *From thence He will come again to judge the quick and the dead*, all is contained in those memorable sentences, which have filled the heart of the Church with Advent anticipation—"They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory;" and, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the Angels with Him, then shall He sit on the Throne of His Glory" (xxiv. 30; xxv. 31).

We say, *I believe in the Holy Ghost*; and did not our Lord warn against the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Did He not express the dependence of His own Human Nature on that same Spirit? Did not His parting words place the Holy Spirit in the formulary for Baptism, with the Father and the Son? (xii. 28, 32; xxviii. 19).

We say, *In the Holy Catholic Church.* Amongst our Lord's most impressive words is His avowal of the intention to build His Church on the Rock of His own Divine Nature, so as to defy the whole brunt and power of the unseen world (xvi. 18); and He made still further subsequent allusion to its binding and loosing power (xviii. 17, 18).

We say, *In the Communion of Saints.* Christ has wrapped up His Saints so closely together that we cannot pray for ourselves

without praying for them—*our* Father, *our* trespasses, *our* daily bread.

We say, *In the Forgiveness of Sins.* "Son," said He, "be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven. The Son of Man hath authority on earth to forgive sins" (ix. 5; xii. 31; xxvi. 28).

We say, *The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting.* On one occasion the Scribes came to entangle Jesus in His talk, proposing a question about the Resurrection, in which they did not believe, and the Master replied: "As touching the Resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I AM the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (xxii. 32).

The Apostles' Creed was our Lord's, and as we consider His words—the words of the One whom all recognise as the supreme

flower on the root of our human race—we are compelled to feel that He could not have been deceived; we build on His words as on an impregnable Rock (vii. 24), and we cry with one heart and voice:—

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.
Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father.
When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of Death,
Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers."

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